
PERSONNEL SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS

Defense Security Service

*Frequently
Asked Questions*



What is the Defense Security Service?

The Defense Security Service (DSS) is an agency within the Department of Defense (DoD). One of our principal missions is to conduct Personnel Security Investigations (PSI) on:

- DoD military or civilian personnel who require a security clearance to access classified or sensitive information.
- Employees of facilities in private industry that are cleared under the DoD portion of the National Industrial Security Program (NISP).

What is a Personnel Security Investigation (PSI)?

A PSI is an inquiry into an individual's loyalty, character, trustworthiness and reliability to ensure that he or she is eligible to access classified information or for an appointment to a sensitive position or position of trust.

Why are PSIs and Security Clearances Necessary?

PSIs and security clearances are key elements in protecting the security of the United States. PSIs and security clearances are required to counter the threats that may stem from:

- Foreign intelligence services;
- Organizations or people who wish to overthrow or undermine the United States government through unconstitutional means, violent acts, or other terrorist group activities;
- Individuals who:
 - May be susceptible to pressure or improper influence.
 - Have been dishonest or demonstrated a lack of integrity that has caused others to doubt their reliability.



Who Decides Whether a Security Clearance or Access to a Sensitive Position Is Granted?

An adjudicator, who is employed by one of the DoD Central Adjudication Facilities (CAFs), reviews the results of a PSI and compares it to established qualifying criteria for granting access to classified information or for an appointment to a sensitive position or position of trust.

Why Me?

You should only be subject to a PSI if you will have access to classified information or be assigned to a sensitive position or a position of trust. If you believe that your job does not or will not involve this level of access, you should discuss the situation with your security officer or the investigator during your subject interview.

What if Another Federal Agency Has Already Conducted a Background Investigation on Me?

Other federal investigative agencies also conduct background investigations on federal government and government contractor employees. The DoD will usually accept such an investigation as the basis for a security clearance depending on when it was conducted and what events may have occurred since the time of the prior investigation.

At My Request, Will DSS Conduct a PSI on Me?

No, DSS can only accept investigative requests from military or civilian organizations under DoD or from contractor facilities that are cleared under the defense portion of the NISP.



How Does the PSI Process Get Started?

If you are a candidate for a security clearance, or a sensitive position or position of trust, you will be asked to complete an Electronic Personnel Security Questionnaire (EPSQ) to provide personal details on your background. Once you complete the document, you must forward it to your security officer who will in turn submit it to DSS. Only a security officer, or another designated official in your organization, has the authority to submit security questionnaires directly to DSS. Your investigation will be opened once DSS receives your EPSQ and validates that it is completely filled out.

What a Long Form! Are All of the Questions Really Necessary?

The EPSQ can seem daunting, but you will find that most questions are fairly straightforward and provide DSS and adjudicative personnel with the necessary information about relevant aspects of your life.

When you fill out the EPSQ:

- (1) Read through the instructions and questions to find out what is required.
- (2) Collect the necessary information.
- (3) Allow plenty of time to complete the form.
- (4) Answer all of the questions.

Failure to complete the form correctly may delay the opening or completion of your PSI and the adjudication of your case. If you do not understand a question, please ask for guidance from your security officer, the person who gave you the questionnaire, or the DSS Customer Call Center at 1-888-347-5213. You may also learn more about EPSQ by visiting the DSS web site at www.dss.mil or by e-mailing a



request for the EPSQ brochure to
brochures@mail.dss.mil .

If you realize after you have submitted the security questionnaire that you have made a mistake or omitted something important, please tell your security officer or the investigator during your subject interview—which is described under the following questions. If you do not acknowledge the mistake, the error or omission could result in an unfavorable adjudicative decision.

Who Should I Name as References and What Will They be Asked?

Your references should be people who have known you for a significant period of your life. These references will be asked questions about your honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness, and their opinion on whether you should be given access to classified information or assigned to a sensitive position or position of trust. Your references will also be asked questions about your past and present activities, employment history, education, family background, neighborhood activities, and finances. During your PSI, the investigator(s) will need to know if you have had any involvement with drugs, encounters with the police, or problem drinking habits, and other facts about your personal history. The investigator(s) will attempt to obtain both favorable and unfavorable information about your background so an adjudicator can make an appropriate determination.



What Is the Investigative Process?


A PSI consists of one or more of the following inquiries:

- A National Agency Check (NAC)—A search of investigative files and other records held by federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM).
- A Local Agency Check (LAC)—A review of appropriate criminal history records held by local law enforcement agencies, such as police departments or sheriffs, with jurisdiction over the areas where you have resided, gone to school, or worked.
- Financial checks.
- Field interviews of references to include co-workers, employers, personal friends, educators, neighbors, and other appropriate individuals.
- Checks of records held by employers, courts, and rental offices.
- A subject interview—An interview with you by an investigator.

These inquiries are performed by one or more investigators who work in the geographic area where the information is to be obtained. NACs, however, may be performed electronically from a central location.

What Will I Be Asked During the Subject Interview?

The objective of the subject interview is to obtain a complete picture of you as an individual so that an adjudicator can determine whether you will be able to cope with having access to classified or sensitive



information without becoming a security risk. Therefore, the interview will be wide-ranging and cover most aspects of your life.


During the subject interview, expect to be questioned about your family background, past experiences, health, use of alcohol or drugs, financial affairs, foreign travel, and other pertinent matters. Remember all these questions are asked for a purpose. The investigator is experienced in conducting these interviews. It is unlikely that anything you say will cause him or her shock or surprise. Be as candid as possible. The investigator will try to put you at ease if you become upset or uncomfortable. It is in your best interest to answer the investigator's questions in order for an adjudicator to reach a valid decision on your suitability to access classified information or be appointed to a sensitive position or position of trust.

Do I Have to Be Interviewed?

Subject interviews are an integral part of most PSIs conducted by DSS. Your participation is completely voluntary. However, without the interview DSS will be unable to conduct a thorough investigation on your background and an adjudicator may not be able to determine your suitability to access classified information or be assigned to a sensitive position or position of trust. As a result, you may be denied a security clearance or an appointment to a sensitive position.

I'm Tempted to Keep Quiet About Something In My Past and Hope Nobody Finds Out.

If you conceal information on your security form or during your subject interview, an adjudicator may determine that you are unreliable and dishonest. In fact your clearance could be denied for withholding information or purposely lying, even though what



you were seeking to conceal would not have resulted in an unfavorable clearance determination.

Even if you obtain a clearance or are assigned to a sensitive position or position of trust, the initial adjudicative decision could be overturned at a later date when it is revealed that you lied or concealed information during the PSI. Federal agencies generally fire or disqualify employees who have materially and deliberately falsified such information. In addition if you knowingly and willfully make material false statements during a PSI, you may be subject to prosecution for violating Title 18, U.S. Code, section 1001.

Can DSS Look at Any Record About Me?

DSS can look at records that are relevant to the guidelines within the PSI program. When you fill out the required security forms and sign a general release statement, DSS will then have the authority to conduct your PSI.


Some records are public information and do not require a specific release. However, you will be asked to sign a specific release statement during the subject interview if DSS is required to check creditor or medical records on you.

Why Do Some Investigations Take Longer Than Others?

If you do not provide accurate information or an answer to all of the questions on the security questionnaire, DSS will not be able to open the PSI on you.

Once the case is opened, however, it could take longer if you have:

- Lived or worked in several geographic locations or overseas.

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- Traveled outside of the United States.
 - Relatives who have lived outside of the United States.
 - Background information that is difficult to obtain or involves issues that require an expansion of your case.

What Can I Do to Keep the Time It Takes to Perform the PSI as Short as Possible?

You can help DSS complete your PSI as quickly as possible by doing the following:


- **Provide Accurate Information on Your Security Questionnaire**—Follow the instructions and answer all of the questions on the form.
- **Use the Electronic Personnel Security Questionnaire (EPSQ)**—At this time employees of DoD activities are required to submit an EPSQ instead of a paper form to enable DSS to process requests for PSIs more efficiently.

Using EPSQ can reduce the time it takes to conduct the investigation on you because:

- (a) The form is electronically forwarded rather than mailed to DSS.
- (b) The information you enter on the form is electronically validated to prevent delays due to inadvertent errors or omissions.

You may obtain more information about EPSQ from the DSS web site at www.dss.mil , by e-mailing a request for an EPSQ brochure to brochures@mail.dss.mil , or by calling the DSS Customer Call Center at 1-888-347-5213.

- **Be as Specific as Possible**—General entries, such as listing your employer as the U.S. Navy,



should be avoided. List your actual duty stations and the dates assigned to each location.

- **If You Are Going to Be Transferred To Another Duty Station, Inform Your Security Officer**—If you expect to be transferred to another duty station in the same organization within 60 days, indicate the location and approximate arrival date on the EPSQ. This information is especially important if you become a subject of a Single Scoped Background Investigation (SSBI) or a SSBI periodic reinvestigation—required for a Top Secret clearance or access to Special Compartmented Information (SCI)—that requires you to be interviewed by a DSS investigator who is assigned to the local area of your duty station. If you learn of the transfer after submitting an EPSQ, please inform the security officer who processed your EPSQ so he or she can take the appropriate action. If a DSS investigator interviews you before you relocate, also inform him or her of your impending transfer.

What About Unfair Discrimination?

All candidates for security clearances, sensitive positions, or positions of trust are treated impartially and consistently regardless of their gender, race, marital status, age, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, disability, or sexual orientation.

What Safeguards Are in Place to Ensure Accuracy and Protect My Privacy?

All personnel involved in the PSI or adjudication process must meet the highest standards of integrity and personal conduct. All information received during the course of a PSI is scrupulously protected under the Privacy Act of 1974 and other applicable laws and statutes of the United States.



If I am Granted a Security Clearance, Who Will Notify Me?

If you receive a security clearance, you will be notified by your employing organization. Before you can have access to classified information, your employing organization must also give you a security briefing. To find out the status of your security clearance, contact your security officer.

Can I Appeal a Clearance Denial or Revocation?


If you are denied a security clearance, or an assignment to a sensitive position or a position of trust, or your current clearance or access is revoked, you have the right to appeal the adjudicative decision. Under such circumstances you will be provided a statement on the reason(s) why you are ineligible for the clearance and the procedures for filing an appeal. If you believe the information gathered about you during the investigation is misleading or inaccurate, you will be given the opportunity to correct or clarify the situation.

How Often Will a Periodic Investigation (PR) Be Done On Me?

After the initial PSI is completed, a Periodic Reinvestigation (PR) is required every 5 years for a Top Secret clearance, 10 years for a Secret clearance, or 15 years for a Confidential clearance. However, civilian and military personnel of DoD can be randomly reinvestigated before they are due for a PR.

If I Had a Clearance or a Favorable PSI in the Past, Can I Now Get a Clearance for Another Position?

To be issued a clearance for another position, you must meet the following requirements:


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- **For A Clearance at a Cleared Facility Under the NISP**, the termination date of your former clearance must have been within the past 24 months, and there must not have been any subsequent adverse information on you that would preclude you from being issued a new clearance. If you do not meet these requirements, the employing organization may ask you to complete an EPSQ for them to request DSS to perform a PSI on you.
 - **For Federal or Military Service**, the date you left prior federal or military service must have occurred less than 24 months ago. However, there must not have been any subsequent adverse information on you that would preclude you from being issued a new clearance. In addition, if your initial investigation or PR was not completed within the timeframe described in the answer to the previous question, an investigation may have to be requested before you can be granted another clearance.

What Happens If Adverse Information About Me is Reported After I Have Had a Security Clearance?

If adverse information on you is reported before a PR is required, a special investigation on you may be requested at that time. If you are due for a PR at the time the adverse information is reported, a PR will be conducted.

Who May I Contact for Information About the PSI Process?

To learn the status of your PSI, please contact your security officer. If you would like additional information on the DSS mission or investigative process,



please visit the DSS web site at www.dss.mil or contact the DSS Office of Public Affairs at (703) 325-5382 or the following address:

Defense Security Service
Office of Public Affairs
1340 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314-1651.



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<http://www.dss.mil>
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request to brochures@mail.dss.mil.**

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